

Kahlil Gibran, Poet of the East

By HOWARD WILLARD COOK.

NO poet-painter who was not an artist in the true sense of the word could produce the sort of work that Kahlil has done in *The Madman*. Gibran has a twofold genius, as the drawings which he has reproduced in this small book are of rare beauty and his prose poems are as fresh and pulsing with poetic life as the psalms of David. It is proper that out of Lebanon in Syria should come a new psalmist and writer of fables, who gives to us of the western world a note too seldom found in the writings of our own poets.

Rodin called Gibran the William Blake of the twentieth century. His publishers affirm that many critics have found him a far greater poet than Tagore. But Gibran is first himself. His talents are the offspring of an original being who is distinctive in his own originality. His work is that of an internationalist who writes not for one race of people, but for all. True, there is an aesthetic quality in Gibran's work that some might declare was for an especially tuned mind, but this is counterbalanced by a knowledge of humanity, an ability to sing to him a fair song and to poke his ribs with the gentle finger of whimsical understanding of his foibles. This is the Gibran of *The Scarecrow*:

"Once I said to a scarecrow, 'You must be tired of standing in this lonely field.'

"And he said, 'The joy of searing is a deep and lasting one, and I never tire of it.'

"Said I, after a minute of thought, 'It is true; for I too have known that joy.'

"Said he, 'Only those who are stuffed with straw can know it.'

"Then I left him, not knowing whether he had complimented or belittled me.

"A year passed, during which the scarecrow turned philosopher.

"And when I passed by him again I saw two crows building a nest under his hat."

But in *Night and the Madman* there is found the Eastern quality, the psalm-like beauty of lines and the music and majesty of words:

"I am like thee, O Night, dark and naked; I walk on the flaming path which is above my day dreams, and whenever my foot touches earth a giant oak tree comes forth."

"Nay, thou art not like me, O Madman, for thou still lookest backward to see how large a footprint thou leavest on the sand."

"I am like thee, O Night, silent and deep; and in the heart of my loneliness lies a Goddess in child-bed; and in him who is being born Heaven touches Hell."

"Nay, thou art not like me, O Madman, for thou shudderest yet before pain, and the song of the abyss terrifies thee."

"Like thee, O Night, like thee, mighty and high, and my throne is built upon heaps of fallen Gods; and before me too pass the days to kiss the hem of my garment but never to gaze at my face."

"Art thou like me, child of my darkest heart? And dost thou think my untamed thoughts and speak my vast language?"

"Yet, we are twin brothers, O Night; for thou revealest space and I reveal my soul."

Throughout Gibran's poems—those that deal with God and Friendship and his commentaries upon so-called vices and virtues—there is a fineness as delicate as Gibran's own "mists that veiled the distant hills."

Not a few of his writings are in fable style. *Aesop* would have found in Gibran pleasant camaraderie. His interpretation of *le bon Dieu* as being a God who gives unto his people that which is most desired of his people is thus recounted:

"One day there passed by a company of cats a wise dog.

"And as he came near and saw that they were very intent and heeded him not, he stopped.

"Then there arose in the midst of the company a large, grave cat and looked upon them and said,

"Brethren, pray ye; and when ye have prayed again and yet again, nothing doubting, verily then it shall rain mice."

"And when the dog heard this he laughed in his heart and turned from them saying, 'O blind and foolish cats, has it not been written and have I not known my fathers before me, that that which raineth for prayer and faith and supplication is not mice but bones.'"

Naturally satiric or ironic values are not unfamiliar to this poet, and these, so apt to become ill-timed explosives in the hands of many, are in Gibran's work managed with perfect restraint. In *War, The Wise King and The Other Language* this deftly handled virtue is found and the result is good.

In the three illustrations used in the Gibran book, there is the well nigh perfect contour of figure that distinguishes his nudes, done with a sweeping grace. But their greatest charm lies in their life—Gibran's figures radiate life—and that same essence of human understanding dominating his poems is found again in them.

THE MADMAN, HIS PARABLES AND POEMS. BY KAHLIL GIBRAN. Alfred A. Knopf. \$1.25.

"Colette Baudouche"

By CONSTANCE MURRAY GREENE

JUST at this time when the thoughts of all the rest of the world are centred upon that small portion where Alsace, Lorraine and Metz are again in the hands of a victorious army *Colette Baudouche*, the story of a young girl of Metz, comes with special significance. Written in 1908 by Maurice Barrès and acclaimed a classic in France, it seems strange that we have not had the translation sooner. Baroness Huard, who will be remembered as the author of *My Home in the Field of Honor*, *My Home in the Field of Mercy* and other works, has lost none of the essence of Monsieur Barrès's exquisite French in translating.

That the story was written at a time when the question of Alsace-Lorraine was far from a burning one to the rest of the world, when the minds of nations even dared to dream of a universal peace, makes it more impressive than if it had been done in the heat of the present conflict. Monsieur Barrès says:

"I have tried to present *Colette Baudouche* in the simplest words and without seeking any dramatic artifice, so as not to lessen for the reader the interest of so true a romance. I have wished to describe the sentiments of recent generations in Alsace, Lorraine and Metz in regard to the conquerors."

When Herr Asmus came to lodge with Colette and her grandmother he had in mind chiefly the perfecting of his French, and so it was with pleasure that he discovered them to be Lorraine people. As the months passed and the influence of the two women made itself felt he absorbed so much of their spirit that his toleration of French ideals was openly condemned by the directors of the school in which he taught.

It did not occur to this self-satisfied youth that he was often the cause of amused horror. When he exhibited with a great show of pride a cushion which he announced was stuffed with his fiancée's hair he replied with undiminished pride

to Colette's demand as to whether she had cut off her hair, "Never, it is the hair that fell when she was combing it."

"Nothing arouses our irony more," Monsieur Barrès remarks here, "than a master in whom we recognize real inferiorities. The proud population of Metz will have entirely disappeared the day when in Metz people will have ceased laughing at conquerors who are so dull."

As the Prussian became more tolerable to the Baudouches Colette became more lovely to him, and in the development of their love affair is shown the depth of that loyalty which has withstood temptation, flattery, terror and threat for forty years and which led to the proclamation by a German General when he entered Alsace in 1914, "You are now in enemy country and you will no longer consider the civil population."

If he had wished to pay a tribute to the Alsations he could have found none more welcome!

COLLETTE BAUDOUCHE. By MAURICE BARRÈS. George H. Doran Company. \$1.50.

Two significant items come from the publishers. Doubleday, Page & Company are reprinting *Astronomy for Everybody*, because, among other orders, 500 copies of the book are wanted for soldiers and sailors. The Frederick A. Stokes Company reports a similar order through the American Library Association for 500 copies of William Atherton DuPuy's *Uncle Sam's Modern Miracles*, a book telling of big undertakings of the Federal Government—census taking, Weather Bureau work, irrigation enterprises, &c. As every librarian knows, there never was anything like the demand among our men in service for books dealing in popular style with scientific subjects, the workings of the Government, all kinds of industrial processes—everything from aviation to laying sewer pipes. An appetite for useful books has been created that will have to be sated after these men, or most of them, return to civil life. Authors, take note, please.

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